



European  
Commission

EAfA

## The EAfA High-Level Event 2024

Unleashing the untapped potential: Apprenticeships as a response to labour shortages

17–18 June 2024 | Brussels, Belgium



### Introduction and Welcome Ceremony

**Nicolas Schmit**, European Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights opened the event by reflecting on the key role of apprenticeships in addressing labour shortages, boosting innovation, facilitating the twin green and digital transition, and overall shaping Europe's social and economic future. Continued emphasis will be placed on upskilling and reskilling at EU level, with numerous initiatives like Erasmus+ centres, the Pact for Skills, and the Youth Guarantee. The latter, in particular, provides support to young people not in education, training and employment (NEETs) to achieve their full potential e.g. through apprenticeships. In this context, the European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA) represents an important platform for actively engaging young people, promoting the exchange of inspiring practices among Member States and relevant stakeholders, and fostering excellence in VET. Through its 440 pledges and national commitments from 40 governments, EAfA has contributed to the creation of 2.5 million apprenticeships and work-based learning opportunities across Europe.



**Nicolas Schmit**, European Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights

**Commissioner Schmit** welcomed 14 new members of EAfA and thanked the 17 EAfA members who have chosen to renew their pledges and the nine governments that have reaffirmed their national commitments. The full list of new pledges and renewals is available [here](#).



**Commissioner Schmit** welcoming 14 new EAfA members

Employment,  
Social Affairs  
and Inclusion

## 1st Panel - Apprenticeships to address labour shortages

**Ludovic Voet**, Confederal Secretary of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), underscored the importance of recognising that apprentices are both learners and workers, ensuring they receive fair remuneration and have safe working conditions.

Following suit, **Valentina Guerra**, Policy Director for Social Affairs and Training at SME United, [highlighted the significance of apprenticeships for small and medium enterprises \(SMEs\)](#) in finding and retaining skilled employees, particularly in sectors facing skills shortages. She emphasised that apprenticeships increase the likelihood of long-term employment within the company and enable SMEs to train apprentices according to their specific needs. **Guillaume Afellat**, Senior Policy Advisor at SGI Europe, highlighted that apprenticeships can be designed to fulfil the new skills demands for services of general interest and public organisations, as those arising from the green transition, allowing companies greater flexibility to create specific positions based on their needs and train future employees accordingly. The session concluded with **Maxime Cerutti**, Director of Social Affairs at BusinessEurope, who highlighted the role of apprenticeships in contributing to the long-term development of a skilled and adaptable workforce. He called for strengthening adults' participation in apprenticeship programmes with the support of social partners.

## 2nd Panel - Apprenticeships as a quality offer under the Youth Guarantee

**Manuela Geleng**, Director for Jobs and Skills at DG EMPL underlined the importance of inclusiveness and outreach activities to ensure that no young person is left behind, which is also emphasised by the reinforced Youth Guarantee and provided examples of how countries are using EU Funds for this purpose. **Bernardo Sousa**, Executive Director of the Youth Guarantee in Portugal, suggested that the Youth Guarantee's ability to reach its target group and young NEETs could be enhanced by involving new stakeholders in outreach activities and young people in the design of communication activities. He emphasised that a 'one-size-fits-all' solution is not feasible for the diverse NEET group. **Miquel Carrion Molina**, Deputy Director on Youth Employment and Qualifications at the Public Employment Service of Catalonia, highlighted the disconnect between companies seeking qualified candidates and candidates searching for quality jobs, noting that the two often fail to find each other. In this context, apprenticeships should be leveraged as a recruitment strategy aiming to support NEETs and employers alike. **Albert Janssens**, Board Member of the Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions (OBESSU) representing the [European Apprentices Network \(EAN\)](#), noted that no young person chooses to become part of the NEET group, which accounted for 11% of the EU population in 2023. He emphasised the need to analyse the root causes of this issue to reduce NEET numbers and advocated for a holistic approach to the Youth Guarantee.

## 3rd Panel - Guidance – the key to anticipation!

**Laila Hove**, Head of the Development Team/National Youth Guarantee at the Norwegian Directorate of Labour and Welfare, discussed a survey conducted by the Norwegian government in collaboration with mental health organisations aimed to better understand the needs of young people and the mental health problems that might prevent them from entering the labour market. The survey underlines the importance of involving young people and youth organisations in policy-making and co-creating public services tailored to their needs, as, for instance, those provided through the Youth Guarantee. **Jan Wilker**, Project Manager at StartNet, stressed the need for early, continuous, and personalised career guidance for young people throughout their education and professional development and the involvement of parents in this process. Mr. Wilker emphasised the role that the EU can play in supporting the dissemination of relevant good practices in addressing common challenges like digitalisation, the green transition, skills mismatches, and youth unemployment. **Alberto Guerra**, Director at the Fundación Empresa Familiar de Castilla Y Leon, outlined the four pillars of their career guidance [Neolkigai](#) platform helping young people make informed decisions about their career paths: identifying what one loves, what one excels at, what the world requires, and what is economically viable. He also showcased the organisation's 'Hello Future' project which aims to promote family businesses to produce a positive social impact. **Vincent Joseph**, European and International Project Manager at [Euroguidance France](#), concluded the session by highlighting the growing demand for apprenticeships in France and the need for improved guidance to support this trend while, at the same time, ensuring the quality of apprenticeship opportunities provided.

## EaFA updates

**Anna Barbieri**, Team Leader for Apprenticeships and Erasmus+, Unit B3 at DG EMPL, highlighted the achievements and activities of EaFA, as well as future outputs for the year:

- 4 [EaFA Communities](#) offering members key opportunities for networking and knowledge exchange on specific themes of interest
- Factsheets on [Erasmus+ projects](#) and [funding opportunities](#) (e.g. ESF+), [transversal skills](#), guidance and awareness raising, and support to SMEs
- Leaflet on [micro-credentials](#)
- Webinars on [apprenticeships and the hospitality sector](#), and green skills
- Toolkits on [learning mobility of apprentices](#), and digital skills, VR, AR in apprenticeships

Four **EaFA champions** were also presented. These champions are selected EaFA members who have been or are committed to being highly engaged with the Alliance, and who will act as EaFA advocates by sharing the latest EaFA news/updates with their networks.

## Pact for Skills updates

**Diana Spiridon**, Team Leader for Pact for Skills, Unit B2 at DG EMPL, provided an update on the Pact for Skills, which now includes five regional partnerships and 20 Large-scale Skills Partnerships across all key industrial ecosystems. Together, they aim to provide upskilling and reskilling opportunities to over 25 million people by 2030. Ms. Spiridon also noted that the initiative shares synergies with EaFA, with several Alliance members also being Pact members, thereby fostering new opportunities for collaboration and knowledge sharing.

## European Apprentices Network activities

**Albert Janssens**, Board Member at OBESSU, provided an overview of the EAN's recent activities. These include advocating for the formal representation of apprentices at regional, national and European levels, ensuring fair working conditions and remuneration for apprentices, and conducting a study on the mental health and well-being of apprentices.

## 4th Panel - Apprenticeships for adults: Unlocking opportunities

**Olga Kafetzopoulou**, Director for VET and Lifelong Learning Planning and Development at the Greek Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs and Sports, highlighted several benefits of apprenticeships for adults. These include enhanced career advancement and personal growth, the development of soft skills, greater attainment of formal qualifications, reduced unemployment, higher productivity, enhanced social mobility, and the promotion of a lifelong learning culture among employers. **Vasile Gafuc**, President of Bucovina Institute, emphasised the importance of providing holistic support to vulnerable groups pursuing apprenticeship opportunities, such as lone parents with childcare responsibilities and individuals with psychological traumas. **Gertrud Hirtreiter**, Head of Unit at the German Confederation of Skilled Crafts and Small Businesses (ZDH) discussed their initiatives to break gender stereotypes and improve gender balance in certain professions. Effective tools include showcasing role models and sharing success stories such as, for example, of young women succeeding in male-dominated fields. Additionally, she highlighted the importance of providing opportunities for women in skilled crafts to discuss themes like balancing family responsibilities with their careers, state childcare, and supporting self-employed pregnant women. **Alessandro Mele**, President of Punto Cometa, presented the Erasmus+ project GIVE, a Centre of Excellence in VET dedicated to innovating the VET sector for the social inclusion of individuals from disadvantaged groups. He stressed the need to shift the paradigm from performance-oriented to person-focused, placing the individual at the centre and fostering their development and growth. Ultimately, this will help fully integrate vulnerable groups into the labour market, society and economy.

### Closing remarks

**Chiara Riondino**, Head of the Vocational Education and Training Unit at DG EMPL wrapped up the event by reflecting on some of the main challenges that emerged from the discussions: increasing the attractiveness of VET and apprenticeships; ensuring apprentices' satisfaction and wellbeing; fostering social inclusion within apprenticeships; and aligning individuals' skills with the labour market needs. Ms. Riondino emphasised that these challenges can be successfully addressed only through the cooperation between all relevant stakeholders, stressing the role EAfA can play by bringing such a diverse community together. After highlighting several upcoming EU-level initiatives aimed at furthering these goals, Ms. Riondino expressed gratitude to EAfA members and participants for their dedication to enhancing apprenticeships in Europe, encouraging them to continue engaging with the Alliance.



Chiara Riondino, DG EMPL

## Main takeaways

1

Quality apprenticeships underpinned by fair working conditions can be part of the solution for labour shortages.

2

The attractiveness of apprenticeships needs to be well communicated, in particular to parents.

3

Despite a decreasing NEET rate in recent years across the EU, European and national stakeholders should intensify efforts to achieve the long-term goal of reducing NEETs to 9% by 2030. Apprenticeships can play an important role by allowing learning in practical contexts while earning a salary.

4

Apprenticeships for adults are valuable for upskilling and reskilling European citizens. Recognition of adults' prior experience and qualifications is essential.

5

Communities of apprentices and practitioners play a crucial role. Young apprentices, transitioning between education and work, often feel isolated. Peer networks, mentoring, and guidance are essential to address these challenges.

6

Apprenticeships can facilitate the integration of vulnerable groups into the labour market. It is vital to tailor apprenticeship programmes to their specific needs and life circumstances and offer comprehensive support.